Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this rulemaking.

I have a significant bilateral hearing loss and use a telecoil-equipped hearing aid (the AVR ImpaCt) in my right ear. (My other ear has zero speech discrimination.)

I first began trying digital wireless phones more than two years ago and had to return two different brands due to accessibility problems, despite an attractively affordable service plan that has not been repeated (100 minutes a month for $16.99 from Sprint PCS). It may not be widely known that there can be more hearing aid interference in some locations than in others due to the distance from the signal towers; testing a cell phone in a store is not a reliable indicator for determining whether a cell phone is accessible in all locations. (Apparently, the further away a phone is from the signal tower, the more interference can result.) Although one phone had appeared accessible in the store, I experienced interference in other locations and lack of service in important areas such as my workplace. I have tried other digital cell phones, such as some of the Motorola digital cell phones with a clamshell design, but have still experienced significant interference. I think I did experience good hearing-aid compatibility with an Audiovox phone with a clamshell design; I think it was digital but it did not have the features I wanted (like wireless web access).

As I understand the problem, the core issue is interference rather than electromagnetic coupling. In some cases, if a telephone manufacturer creates a barrier between the antenna and the ear piece of a digital cell phone, it might be possible to reduce the interference to a negligible amount. I had heard over two years ago that Motorola was working on creating a battery that would shield the earpiece from the antenna; I have also heard that phones using a clamshell design are more apt to have less interference due to the distance of the earpiece from the antenna. Some people have experienced no interference with their hearing aids using
the Samsung SCH-3500. It appears that it is technologically possible to create digital cell phones that minimize interference.

Let me emphasize that hearing-aid compatible accessories are not an adequate solution to access. I personally own a Nokia 6162 digital wireless phone and had a loopset which was extremely difficult to attach to the phone. Not only did the 3 air-activated hearing aid batteries die without warning, abruptly cutting off phone calls, but they were also very difficult to replace even though I have good eyesight and dexterity. More importantly, it is extremely awkward to answer a phone call if using an accessory is mandatory. The accessory either has to be attached to the phone at all times, which is not always practical, or valuable time is lost trying to attach the accessory to the phone, by which time the call may be terminated.

I have not used the loopset for a year or more but instead use my Nokia 6162 phone by taking my hearing aid out and pressing my ear to the phone, which sometimes has turned the phone off since the power button is right on the earpiece. Naturally I would like a better phone, but I have not yet found a hearing-aid compatible phone with all the features I need (web access and 2 way messaging). Even future products with many attractive accessibility features appear unlikely to be hearing-aid compatible: the Kyocera QCP 6035 (http://www.kyocera-wireless.com/showroom/showcase/coming_soon_6000.htm), which supports TTY calls, does not have a clamshell design, and the Motorola Accompli 009 Personal Interactive Communicator, an otherwise almost complete communication device which uses GSM.

The digital features of digital cell phones are especially useful to people with hearing loss due to such options as two-way messaging, wireless web browsing, the availability of internet relay service, and the possibility of VCO functionality (being able to talk to the other caller but to use the relay service by reading the screen). As a hard of hearing person, it is rather frustrating to see a digital cell phone with many, many features useful for communication with deaf or deafened people but which handicap hard of hearing people.

It is my dream to someday be able to use a digital cell phone with web access to navigate my way out of a traffic jam, particularly since I and others with hearing loss cannot use the radio to understand why we're stuck in traffic for an hour. Digital cell phones could help compensate for the inaccessibility of other situations, but not if they remain inaccessible.

The lack of hearing-aid compatible digital cell phones is very much an ongoing problem. Many service providers do not offer a phone that either has a clamshell design or is capable of switching to analog. Technological solutions for

hearing aid compatibility appear to be available but many manufacturers will not pursue them unless they are required to do so. I have talked to many companies at the Consumer Electronics Show and other conventions who indicate they will not provide accessibility solutions unless they are required to do so. There is also a very real danger that the need for direct hearing aid compatibility will continue to be trivialized and disregarded due to the thinking that hearing-aid compatible accessories are available, even though these accessories are costly and impractical for rapid access to a ringing phone.

I urge the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau to issue a very clear directive to the industry that hearing aid compatibility must be incorporated in all new phones and that phones should be clearly labelled as to whether they are hearing-aid compatible and whether they will generate interference with hearing aids. The industry needs to hear a strong, clear voice from the FCC; it will sadly ignore the needs of hard of hearing people otherwise.

Thank you for your attention to this serious problem.

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